

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL**

**ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF LOWELL, MA:
MAKING, REMAKING, AND REMAKING AGAIN**

INTFORMANT: TOOCH VAN [CAMBODIA]

INTERVIEWERS: SUSAN THOMSON AND CHRISTOPH STROBEL

DATE: DECEMBER 12, 2007

S = SUSAN

T = TOOCH

C = CHRISTOPH

Tape 07.07

S: So, as you know, we're doing this for the National Park, and I sent you a list of questions, but I wanted to stress that the questions are just sort of guidelines, and that the main point is to just have a conversation together about your experience coming to Lowell and what life has been like while you've been here. So the first thing, is if you could just give us some basic information, your name, where you live in Lowell, when you came . . .

T: Ok, so my name again, Tooch A. Van. I live in Lowell, I live on Pawtucket Blvd areas actually, but next week, I'm going to Middlesex Street, near the DeMoulas, one of the Princeton Properties. I came to the United States as a student, I got a scholarship from Cambodia in 1997. And I started to study here, I started as an international student at Middlesex, living in Lowell, and after 2 years I transferred to Trinity College in Hartford, and then I went to Tufts to do my grad school there, at the Fletcher School. Now I'm back to the same college where I began. It's been a great experience to live in Lowell, and to see the changes in Lowell.

S: And why did you come here in the beginning, or how did you make the connection to come to Middlesex from Cambodia?

T: It was sort of fortunate, as far as luck. I worked at the US Embassy, as part of USAID, and I'd been searching for, because I cannot afford it, I need a scholarship to come and study in the States, and the gentleman, Frank Falcetta, he was associate provost here, before, and he made a trip to Cambodia, and I got a note from my friend saying that a

delegation from a community college went to Cambodia, why don't you meet them? So I asked Frank to have a dinner, and that was in '95. And then, we corresponded for a year, and then he awarded me a scholarship to come here, so that's the connection. So that was very lucky, if Frank didn't make the trip to Cambodia, I wouldn't have had the chance to come here. Maybe other opportunities will come, but that was a ticket for me to come here and live in Lowell.

S: And how did your family react, were they supportive about you coming here?

T: Yes, they were very supportive. As you know, I have only an adoptive family. My parents, brothers and sisters passed away during the Cambodian genocide when I was 3 years old. So I lived in different foster homes. And the last foster family was very nice, so they became my parents. They are very supportive and very proud of me, as you know . . . to become a scholar . . . that I would have a chance to come to the States and live here, so they are very proud of me, and we keep in touch by writing and phone.

S: Do they ever come here?

T: No, they cannot afford it; maybe they will come later on. My adopted aunt was a nurse, but she retired there, and now, I'm married, so my mother-in-law and father-in-law are kind of my adopted family, too and they are very supportive. And my mother-in-law, she plans to come in August.

S: Oh, that's good. And what did you expect it would be like before you came to the U.S.?

T: Oh, I never . . . I mean, it was a cultural shock. And, when I was in Cambodia, I didn't have the ability to see the world, I just stayed there, to be honest with you. I viewed the United States through the lens of movies, usually when I was in Cambodia, the movies that got into Cambodia were mostly action movies and some movies are violence, like New Yorkers killing each other, and I said, "oh my god." I remember one other movie I watched was Golden Gate in San Francisco. Golden Gate. And that's my lens for the United States . . . before I had no idea about the people here or the education, I did not know about anything about the United States. And when I came here, I was at the airport and it was just, my friend came to pick me up, and it was culture shock for me. The people were very nice, and welcoming, but the first 3-6 months was very hard for me. The weather is very different.

S: Yes.

T: And so it's hard, it's very hard for me. Especially language, culture shock in terms of learning the education system here. The education system is almost completely different from Cambodia. I learned in Cambodia, you're not expected to ask a lot of questions, my teacher is my god. And we were not expect to argue with the teachers, we just learned by remembering formulas, and writing down the facts, mostly memorizing. And here, the homework has given us the opportunity for creativity; the teachers are short of letting me

or other students to in charge of our own learning, and to manage times and our lives academically and socially. So that was a paradigm shift for me. I had never had this kind of the opportunity before. So it was hard at the beginning.

S: Did you take courses on both campuses, Bedford or Lowell?

T: Yes, I took them on both campuses. But socially, the way people deal with each others is different, the American expressions are different. I drove in Cambodia for many years, so I got a permit when I was here in 6 months so I went to do a road test. the police said, when he asked me to drive, and he said “pull over.” And I just kept driving. And then he said “pull over,” and I just kept driving. And then he said to me, “do you understand English?” I said “yes, I understand English.” “Then why don’t you stop?” and I said “Oh, pull over means stop?”.... the police just looked at me, he said “ok go back” so I didn’t pass the road test. So if I had known that pull over means stop, it wouldn’t be a problem. So something like that is, I wish I can know it before.

S: And then, when you were in the college, were you taking English courses too, when you first came?

T: Oh yes the college writing. I took TOEFL before, so I don’t have to go through ESL programs. I wish I could go to ESL to be honest with you, but I had a certain scholarship that I need to pass English proficiency.

S: So they have different programs . . .

T: Yeah, they have a 2 year program, you have to finish it. But I remembered some the English courses here, so it was a nightmare. I took literature course and they asked me to read Shakespeare and Thoreau, so I had no idea. And I remember that I was crying in the room, because I couldn’t understand the materials, I would read 200 pages three times, and still not understand. So I said ok, I can. One time my self-esteem and confidence got low, and I said I was not the college material here. And then the stress was coming on. So, even though you’re a scholar, you get a scholarship to come, but when your self-esteem gets low, you get lost. And then I was thinking about going back, and I was sort of stressed out about everything. And I went to one of my teachers, maybe Frank, and he said this may be normal, when you come here. So I hung out there. And the academic support lab, it became my second home. I would fall asleep there. So it took awhile. I spoke English in Cambodia. But can you imagine for the people who never, ever spoke English before?

S: It must have been tough. So where were you living at that time?

T: I live in one of the apartments. Oh, living situation is another story. Do you know Rithy Uong? I knew him before, when he was in Cambodia, and he went to work for one of the NGOs, non-profit organization called Pact. And so I met him, and when I came

here I searched for him for a recommendation for housing. And he recommended to me with some friends, who live on Wood Street, a kind of old apartment due to my low budget; of course. So I lived there in October, and in December, at one time, we had no heat. December, can you imagine? And I was so cold. And I called Frank, and said can we call a landlord, can we do something? And he said, you can call a landlord, but the landlord will never show up. And it took about 2 weeks for it to be fixed. So I got a hot water bottle, and brought it into the bed with me at night. My friend, Cristina Mansfield kept calling and saying, are you okay, and I would say, well so far. Well, it took me about a year to get comfortable, to get used to the situation here. And to grasp the education and literature courses here.

S: Yes.

T: That's so hard.

S: And you were able to do so well, too, you did really well here, and then you went on to Trinity and then to Tufts.

T: Yes, I would say Middlesex gave me a lot of foundations in terms of learning to speak and write English . . . It's still a challenge, English, it's the most difficult language I still have a bit of a problem.

S: And have you been back to Cambodia many times since you've been here?

T: Oh yes, I have. I consider myself one of the lucky guys who have connections with both countries. That's why I told you that I worked with Pact and USAID, but before that I worked with the NGOs, and they are very generous when I was a student. They helped pay for my tickets to go back, and to do work with them for free. So they pay for a ticket, and hey, I go home! And going home, it kind of builds my self-confidence too. You go home, and see your friends, and learn something that you contribute back to home. I feel very humble, but also proud, and that boosts up my confidence. And once, Frank asked me to host the Faculty Fulbright Team and I got to home again.

S: Oh, the group that came from here?

T: Yes, 8 professors including Sandi Shea, Rick Doud, Peyton Paxson, Ken Dunn, Elliot Wheelwright, Ray Shea, Betty Millin, Cheryl Wotring, from here and two from UML. They were Joyce Taylor Gibson and John Shirley.

S: But do you think that you'll ever go back to live in Cambodia?

T: For good, yes, one day. One day, yes.

S: Do you think . . . I know that you just got married, do you think your wife would also like to go back to Cambodia one day?

T: Yes, we have the same impressions and beliefs. We live here, and we try to learn, as much as possible, because here, great place to get education. There are a lot of resources, a lot of learning opportunities for both of us. My wife is coming next week, by the way.

S: What is she going to do when she comes?

T: We'll see, she's educated, and fluent in three languages: French, English and Khmer, so maybe she'll work at one of the NGOs here, either CMAA or CTI, we'll see what happens. I want to start a little family and starting with what we have.

S: Has she been to the United States before?

T: She visited me last April. She's studied abroad, France, she's been to Europe, so it won't be a lot of culture shock for her. Plus, she has me, so I can help her to adjust to the situation here. So I wouldn't worry too much about the culture shock. But of course, it's always something new and challenge, when we embark on a new thing, it's a new challenge and opportunity at the same time.

S: It always takes some time.

T: Yes. And I talked with her last night, and we know that it's going to be, no matter what.

S: So, the next general area is just about life in Lowell. I know that you said you've been living in Pawtucket area, but you're going to move to once of the Princeton Properties on Middlesex Street. This might be kind of hard to ask . . .

T; Sure thing, go a head

S: But what do you think of the neighborhoods in Lowell? The Princeton Properties would be part of Middlesex Village, and then there is a growing Cambodian neighborhood in the Highlands. Do you have any sense about that, about how the neighborhoods are developing?

T: I mean, they are changing a lot. Even in the Highlands, a lot of new businesses and new housings. It has developed a lot in the past 10 years. But at the same time there are a lot of challenges. I would say the education is still limited in the community. It could happen to any immigrant community . . . but that's the area we need to work on a lot for me . . .

S: The education, the schools

T: And, I live in Lowell, I view myself as one of the community members. And I keep working on the challenges and try to deal as much as possible. If I can do anything with the community, I'm happy and proud to do it. And sometimes when you see a lot of problems in the community, you feel stress. There are a lot of complaints in the

community, but not a lot of doing, but at the same time this is part of the problem. The community is still young, not young, but their education is still limited. So I view my role as an educator, to keep working on the problems, and take pride in the accomplishments, and just keep working.

S: Who are the people who are working with you on this, who you consider to be leaders in the Cambodian community?

T: Well, some of them, like Samkhann Khoeun and Rithy Uong, and Vesna Nuon and I interact with them on different tables, like I'm still on the board of CMAA and advisor to Khmer Culture Institute in Lowell. And also, I am on the board of the Culture of organizations in Lowell (COOL), and advisory board of the City Manager Gang Task Force of Lowell.

S: So you're on a lot of the boards?

T: Yeah.

S: I know there was some talk about an organization for Cambodian Arts, the Cambodian Arts Association.

T: Yes, Samkhann was doing that. He had only a handful of people, who were willing to work on a volunteer basis, so it's still a challenge, we need more participation from the community. We need to get more people involve for the good cause.

S: Does he have a building, was he able to get the church?

T: No, it didn't work out. We were very disappointed.

S: So right now, there's no building associated with it.

T: Right now there are a couple of non-profit associations, such as CMAA, Cambodian Light of Children, Khmer Culture Institute. I serve on those boards, and help as much as possible. And Samkhann, I and others organize Cambodian Expressions, and that's a part of the college. So I'm proud of that. And keep working hard, it's always a problem, but just keep working hard. I'm very optimistic about the Cambodian community in Lowell. They work so hard, and they try to build their lives here. It's not easy. But now that some of them are very comfortable, they have their houses, some of them can give something back to their community, at least the people who have more and are comfortable, to give something back to the community, it's a beauty of human being. But that is big challenge that we need to work on.

S: Right. Do you think that most Cambodians feel that they should give something back to the community here, or that they should send things back home to Cambodia?

T: It's still mixed, Susan, it's different generations. Most of the older generation, they like to go back and give to their relatives over there or build the temples and help out to foster the community in Cambodia. And young generation has started to work here and try to give help to people and give back to the community. It's different, different generations. But that's a big area that we need to work on. We try to help, and ask the people to give back as you can. It doesn't have to be money, but your time and contribution in different ways. I would say right now, it's still a challenge issue for the Cambodian community.

S: Ok. So while you've lived in Lowell, how many different places have you lived in? I'm just trying to get a sense of the different communities . . .

T: Sure.

S: You said you live in Pawtucket area now . . .

T: I lived in 5 different places. When I got here I lived on Wood Street, in Wood Apt., near Princeton Blvd. And then I lived there for 6 months. And then I lived on Market Street, because it was close to school and I could walk to school. And then I lived on Royal Street, I never said that word right, but Royal Street. And then I lived on Pawtucket area at Mt Hope Street . And now I'm going to live on Middlesex Street.

S: Do you think that most people in the Cambodian community live in all parts of Lowell, or are there certain neighborhoods that are more . . .

T: Highlands has a lot, and different parts of Lowell, it's kind of scattered. Right now one of the business areas, besides the Pailine Plaza in the Highlands, is on Broadway, they have another plaza, and the gentleman is very nice, his name is Chou. He gave an affordable rent to CMAA, it's a very good price. I consider him is nice, but also the owner of the International Battam Bang market, Jimmy (Sroun) is a wonderful guy and helping the community out a lot.

S: That's good.

C: Cupples Square is also very active.

T: Yes, that's Cupples Square.

S: Do you find that when you buy groceries and stuff like that, do you shop in Lowell, or do you go outside of Lowell?

T: Oh, I always shop in Lowell. I shop in Lowell, I want to do something in Lowell, I live in Lowell. This is something negative about some of the businessmen – but I think that some of them, they don't want to live in Lowell. They have a business in Lowell, try to build the economy in Lowell. And that's the way I view it. But some businessmen, they want to live in Billerica or Westford, because their children will go to better schools,

but at the same time, they are getting benefits from Lowell, please try to give back a little bit to Lowell but that's only some of them. Some of them still live in Lowell.

S: Do you think many people in the Cambodian community are moving out of Lowell?

T: Not many.

S: Not too many?

T: Not too many, only some, I think a lot of people still live in Lowell.

S: Have you personally ever felt part of a neighborhood, like the Highlands, or any of the places that you've lived?

T: Belonging to?

S: Yes, belonging to, like Pawtucket area. . .

T: No, I don't have any problems living in any of areas, I love to live in Lowell, even sometimes I have very conscious, when I go out to eat, I'd rather go eat something in Lowell so I can contribute something to Lowell.

S: Yes

T: And that's sometimes a little bad, they say you are too much in Lowell, that kind of thing. But I want to be, I believe that one person can make a difference if you just start from yourself, you can do good.

S: Yes. And have you personally ever experienced any kind of ethnic tension in Lowell? Either within your own group, the Cambodians, or between different ethnic groups in Lowell?

T: What do you mean, like Hispanic

S: Yes, like between different groups.

T: I never experienced it myself, but I know that it happens. For example, I serve on the Gang Taskforce Advisory, the college, the city of the Lowell and the police dept and the Middlesex district attorney, and the courts and others. There are a lot of issues about tension between Hispanic gangs and Cambodian gangs. But it's been down by the way, the gang violence is down. It's calmed down since last year. The chief reports every month, we have a meeting every month.

S: That's good to hear.

T: But still tension, but I've never experienced it myself.

S: What about within the Cambodian community, is it a fairly cohesive community, or is there a lot of tension within this group itself?

T: Sometimes there is tension, some jealousy, some tensions, but that happens to all communities, especially when the education is still limited. Sometimes the Cambodian community fights for nothing. It's bad. And another bad example in the Cambodian community is the temple.

S: Yes, that was another area . . . are you religiously active at all?

T: I mean, I practice Buddhism, but I go to church sometimes, too . . . for me, I just look at the spiritual, not religion so much, the spiritual, it calms me down, it makes me more humble, a good human being, that's what I believe in. And, but to go back to the problem with the Cambodian community at the temple, it's a very sad issue. Because temple is a place that most of the Cambodians respect it. And they respect the monk, as a role model, teacher, counselor in the community, and if the monk, if the temple is fighting, how can we respect? For me, it's sad to see that happens. And for example, when they have a Buddhist ceremony once in awhile, and the upstairs temple organizes different events, and the downstairs temple organizes other events, which contrast each other, and make it confusing for community members. And especially for the newer generation, they say, that's the Buddhists fighting. And that's sad, as a person, you believe, that's a big challenge.

S: And it hasn't gotten any better? I know there was a court decision . . .

T: Well, the court made the decision that you have to get together, that thing. But Susan, it's very difficult, it's human beings. The court ordered that they get together, but they didn't get together. It's challenging. And that's sad, it's very sad for the community. But I view that as a challenge for community members, how can we work it out. And this problem happened almost 20 years, not 20 but maybe 15 years in the community. So there are still a lot of tensions. Still, they disrespect each other. And the gap between the older generation and the younger generation is still a problem. The old, they need more respect from the new generations, and the new generations say that you want to earn respect, you have to give some respect. Which is true, you cannot just sit there and complain and complain but do nothing, no one will respect you. And you have to be actually doing something. I support that argument, if you want respect, you have to lead by example, and do something. And the old, that's good, that's how they contribute back. Samkhann Khoeun, for example, he's older than me, and he does a lot of things. I respect the people who are doing things and leading by example. I don't respect people just talking all the time and complaining. That's the reality. So it's still an issue.

C: Do you also find that there are tensions between the mainstream white Lowell community and the Asian community, have you ever been called names because of your Asian background, is that part of the reality in Lowell?

T: I think there is still tension. But I've never experienced it by myself to be honest with you. But through discussions with my colleagues and community members, they still have . . . they might say, all Asians are the same. But I never have experienced it myself. I can see that the mainstream for me, on the gang taskforce advisory, the mayor, not the mayor, the city manager, the chief, the district attorney was there, and we discuss it and we respect each other. So, I never experienced it, but when we have these discussions, there are some people who have. So I conclude that it still happens.

S: And, do you think too that the Cambodian community in Lowell has a political voice in the city?

T: Not much now. Now it is gone. I wish to have a rep there.

S: Do you think there is much chance that you will have another candidate?

T: Hopefully, we try to encourage people to run. It's still a challenge for the community. There are two challenges. One, find a good candidate that will do something economically, intellectually, morally and ethically right. Second, to get Cambodian people out to vote. It's very challenging. For example, I helped my roommate, he ran for City Council last year, and I spent hours on the phone . . .

S: Oh, who was that?

T: Mehmed Ali.

S: Oh, yes. You room with him?

T: Yes, he's my roommate. I called almost 300 people. But it's very challenging. For example, "Ok, where are you voting." "Ok, we will pick you up." "No, I don't want to go." So something like that – even when we will go to pick them up! They just don't want to go. A lot of people don't see the importance of politics. But that's very crucial, if you don't use your voice and your vote, it's nothing. So that's the second challenge, we need to educate people and educate them how to vote. I wish from the bottom of my heart that we would have a rep from the immigrant communities or the people who support immigrants, because it's really a vital issue.

S: Yes, it's very important.

C: And it seems to be an issue not only in the Cambodian community, but we've been hearing people voicing this concern in other communities, too, that there isn't enough political involvement . . .

T: Definitely . . .

C: Pro-immigrant candidates or candidates from the community. It's very interesting.

T: Yes.

S: So. Well, we've kind of been jumping around, but I think that's fine, and I don't want to keep you too long, because I know you have things to do. But maybe we could talk a bit about Lowell National Historical Park. One thing we would want to know, is are there any programs or exhibits that you would like to see developed?

T: Yes. Like Cambodian Expressions tried to help. I worked with the Lowell National Park on Cambodian Expressions, through Samkhann Khoeun and Kent Mitchell here. We would love to have immigrant displays and art, just regularly. If they could do something monthly, Hispanic or African month, and Asian celebration month, it doesn't have to be Cambodian. That would be great. For example, I use the National Park a lot, to be honest with you, and it's kind of a guide to introducing Lowell. All my American friends who visit Lowell, I always bring them to the visitor's center. They have a very cool introduction film, you can watch a film there and learn a lot about years ago, I love that. And I take them on the canal tour, and bring them to the Cambodian community to eat, and then send them home. And it's amazing, and if we have events, we spend a lot of energy doing that, but if we could have immigrant themes, that would be awesome.

S: Yes, that would be great. Now they have the one exhibit at the Mogan Center, but . . .

T: If they could open . . .

S: Yes, if they could open.

T: But it's challenging. Takes a lot of staff and energy. And Deon does a lot, she works there a lot, now I'm working with the Park and the COOL to help out with the culture, in Destination World. So I wish we could do more through that.

S: Do you think they'll do Cambodian Expressions again this year?

T: It's challenging, Susan. Samkhann tried to email me a few times this year, that's why we go back to trying to get people to do more. It's been a big challenge, it's not only the generations, even the old generation and the young generation, both of them, not many of them want to help out.

S: And there's no funding?

T: We don't have funding to do it, it's very hard. We, Samkhann and I can meet and try to talk about it. But it's only three of us, trying to do an event, is very hard.

S: But it's been quite good.

T: It's been quite good, 2-3 years, and last year was a big deal for us, working together with UML, the city of Lowell and others to put together the Cambodian Opera.

S: Yes, that was amazing.

T: A big accomplishment.

S: Ok. Let's see, do you have any role in any of the festivals in Lowell?

T: Yes, I actually ran the water festival for 2 years. And I served on the board for 2 years. Even this, the water festival, we still need people to help out. I'm out of the board right now, but I really supported those ideas. I will volunteer it again.

S: They bring many people to Lowell.

T: Absolutely, and economically it's good, and the people can learn about Lowell and bring the resources to Lowell. And they like the water festival, people from everywhere, some of them from Canada and California. And that's amazing to me, that they come for one day to celebrate culture, and meet people. And usually we do only daytime events, because we don't have the capacity to do evening events. And, evening events, people who participate, they go and pack most of the Cambodian and Southeast Asian restaurants in the evening, it's amazing.

S: I know that at some point a few years ago, there was some fear that it would be difficult to keep organizing it. But I think now those events are quite stable . . .

T: It's still a challenge. We've been getting money from a couple sources, from the foundation by the Park, and the Wang Foundation has been giving to us for a couple of years. And the Park said that we will not keep doing that, you have to find your own money. So we've been out in the community, getting ads, so we have some money, and charge for booths. I can see a lot of potential in that festival, the money is not a problem. The two challenges to keep the water festival going, one is, to get the city to buy in, to get the mainstream buy-in, this water festival is good for the city – good economically, good socially, and to get them to buy-in, that this festival belongs to them, too. That's a big challenge. Right now the city still charges for the water festival, the police department charges the Water Fest. That's a fair charge – the police work for it; we pay the police around 10,000 dollars every year, because they work overtime, so of course they get paid. But the whole point is, if we could get the city to buy in, like the folk festival . . . we will be better off.

S: Then it's much easier.

T: It's much easier, we can incorporate those sorts of things. And then the second thing, let's get the younger generation more involved, and get them organized to work on planning, different events that would be run by them, so they can feel proud. Now, it's not many. That's still a big challenge. But money-wise, it's not really a big issue. That's personal opinion, maybe I'm so positive – but I think it's just get people involved, and get the city buy-in.

S: To keep it going.

T: Keep it going, yes.

S: Ok, there's just a few summary and concluding questions. I'm wondering about your dreams and visions for the future . . .

T: For Lowell?

S: Yes, for Lowell, for yourself, for your family . . . what would you say are your visions?

T: My dream is, for myself, I just want to establish a good and decent family, to train my kids well, and my kids will have a chance to learn both worlds, bilingual, and get a good education and my wife still loves when I am old. That's for myself. And if I have ability to give back more to the community, that's the big dream for me. Because I've been giving back to the community, but if I had more stability in the family, of course then I would give more, on a big scale including money and times. That's the big dream for me, my kids having a good education.

S: Is there anything you would like to see Lowell be like, a few years from now?

T: I would love, a couple of things, if the people coming to Lowell would view Lowell as the place they can come and learn, the beauty of diversity economically and socially. For example, I learned a lot about the park, the Shed Park, they're going to create a park in Lowell, amazing, and make it like Boston Common . . .

S: Oh really? I didn't know about that. Where is it?

T: I don't . . .

C: Well, I don't know how much this is in the planning stage or not, so I'm the wrong person to ask . . .

T: Yes, like common park, that's their dream, like Boston Common. That's amazing, the people who come here and visit Lowell, they bring more money to Lowell. And that's one thing, I think that's amazing. I want to see that Lowell has a marketplace that people come to Lowell to enjoy and learn and see different things.

Now to get back to when I was in graduate school at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts, actually there was tension, well not tension, but just sort of a stereotype. When I was in grad school, only 165 students in the Fletcher School in my class, but for Cambodian, only me. And one of my American friends, a very good friend, I'm not saying she's bad or anything. And when we talked a little about my background, and then she said, "what are you doing when you graduate?" And I said "I'm going to go back to Lowell and do some work there." And she said, "what, why are you going back to

Lowell?” That says something, right there. They viewed Lowell as a gang city and a bad city, people shoot each other on the street. And I said “no, a very interesting place, why not?” You know. I learn a lot of policy, but you have to implement it at the you have to work on it at grassroots level. For me, it’s beauty when you will have a chance to test if the policy is works or not, but she’s is my friend --but the perception is still there. You know what I mean.

C: That’s the nickname for the city, it used to be “Lo-Hell,” or “Hole.”

T: Yeah.

C: But the city has bad . . . I mean you talk to people in Boston, and you think, are we talking about the same city? How come I haven’t gotten shot?

T: Yes, exactly.

C: I just live 3 blocks from Cupples Square, and it’s really funny, the students will say, “You live in Lowell?” Why not?

T: Exactly.

S: So I think that is about all of the questions, but I was wondering if there is anyone else you think we should speak with.

T: Samkhann Khoeun.

S: Yes, definitely. I’ll have to email you to get his number. Is he still working at the high school?

T: Yes, he still runs the project between the high school and the college.